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8 *ATHENAGORAS: A tribute to one of greatest figures of contemporary Christian*

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Living City is published 11 times a year (10 monthly and a bimonthly issue in August-September) by the Focolare Movement, a non-profit corporation, P.O. Box 496, New York, NY 10021.
Subscription prices for one year: USA and possessions: US$10.00; Canada: US$12.00; Elsewhere: US$18.00; Air Mail (all countries): US$25.00.
An envelope is enclosed in each magazine for subscriptions or renewals. Use this address for subscription orders and inquiries: LIVING CITY, P.O. Box 126, Jamaica, NY 11415.
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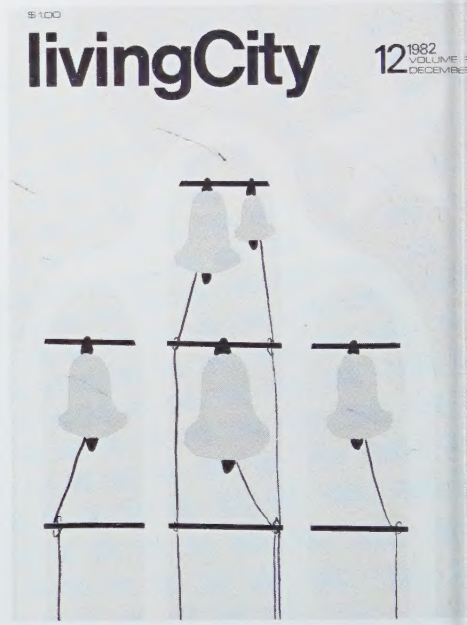

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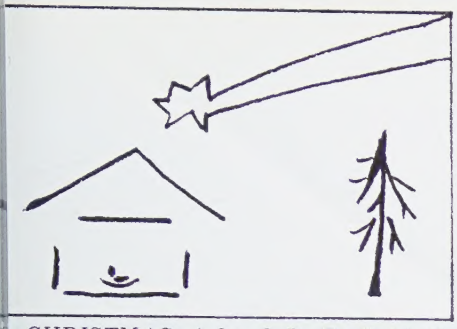

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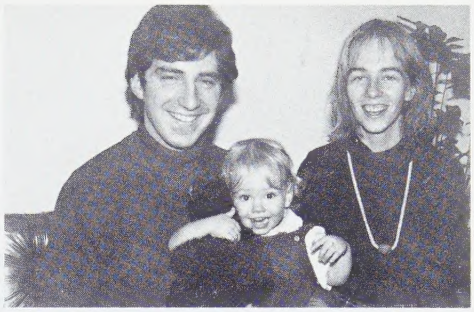

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Dear friends:

We are sorry that we have found it necessary to increase the subscription rates of Living City. We wanted to let you know that as of January 1, 1983 individual copies will cost $1.25 with the following subscription rates:

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We couldn't do otherwise, and we hope that this will not cause much inconvenience.

We would like to invite you to subscribe all your relatives and friends before December 31, 1982 thus taking advantage of the present rates (USA $10.00; Canada US$12.00; Foreign US$18.00; Airmail US$25.00).

Thank you for your understanding and continued generous support.

Sincerely yours,

Mary Young
Circulation Manager

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"PATRON OF OUR DIFFICULT CENTURY"

Maximilian Kolbe

BY GINO LUBICH

On October 10, 1982 the canonization of Father Maximilian Kolbe took place in Rome. Considered one of the great figures of this century, Father Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan, offered his life for a fellow-prisoner condemned to die in the Starvation Bunker of Auschwitz.

It happened at harvest time. "It was near the end of July 1941..." No one remembers the exact date.

At that time of year the usual pick-and shovel work was interrupted as the prisoners were sent out to harvest the wheat and barley from the sparse patches of ground not yet claimed by the marshes.

On one of those evenings, the work crews (or blocks) of prisoners returned as usual from a day of forced labor. Lined up inside the bleak quadrangle of the prison compound, all the prisoners answered the evening roll call — all, that is, except one. His number was repeated again and again. Total silence. A prisoner, taking advantage of work outside the compound, had escaped. The man was from Block 14.

The alarm sounded. "Our Block was immediately surrounded by the SS guards with automatic rifles, and dogs," the painter Koscielniak remembered. The Gestapo went out to hunt down the escaped inmate.

All the "blocks" of prisoners were summoned and lined up along the four sides of the huge quadrangle. They seemed less like human beings, and more like grotesque mannequins: thousands of identical coats draped over living skeletons standing in straight vertical rows. It was a gigantic chamber of horrors. The guards posted in the watchtowers ran their machine guns slowly up and down the rows.

Commandant Fritsch, or "Bullneck" as he was called by the prisoners, paced up and down the rows. He was accompanied by *Raportführer* Palitsch and flanked on all sides by an armed guard of SS men.

He shouted out the dreaded threat, the one used in such cases. The interpreter translated for him: "If the fugitive is not recovered, ten prisoners from his Block will be condemned to death in the Starvation Bunker."

The Starvation Bunker: his diabolical creation.

The threat struck terror in each prisoner from Block 14. Whose turn would it be. "Will it be mine?"

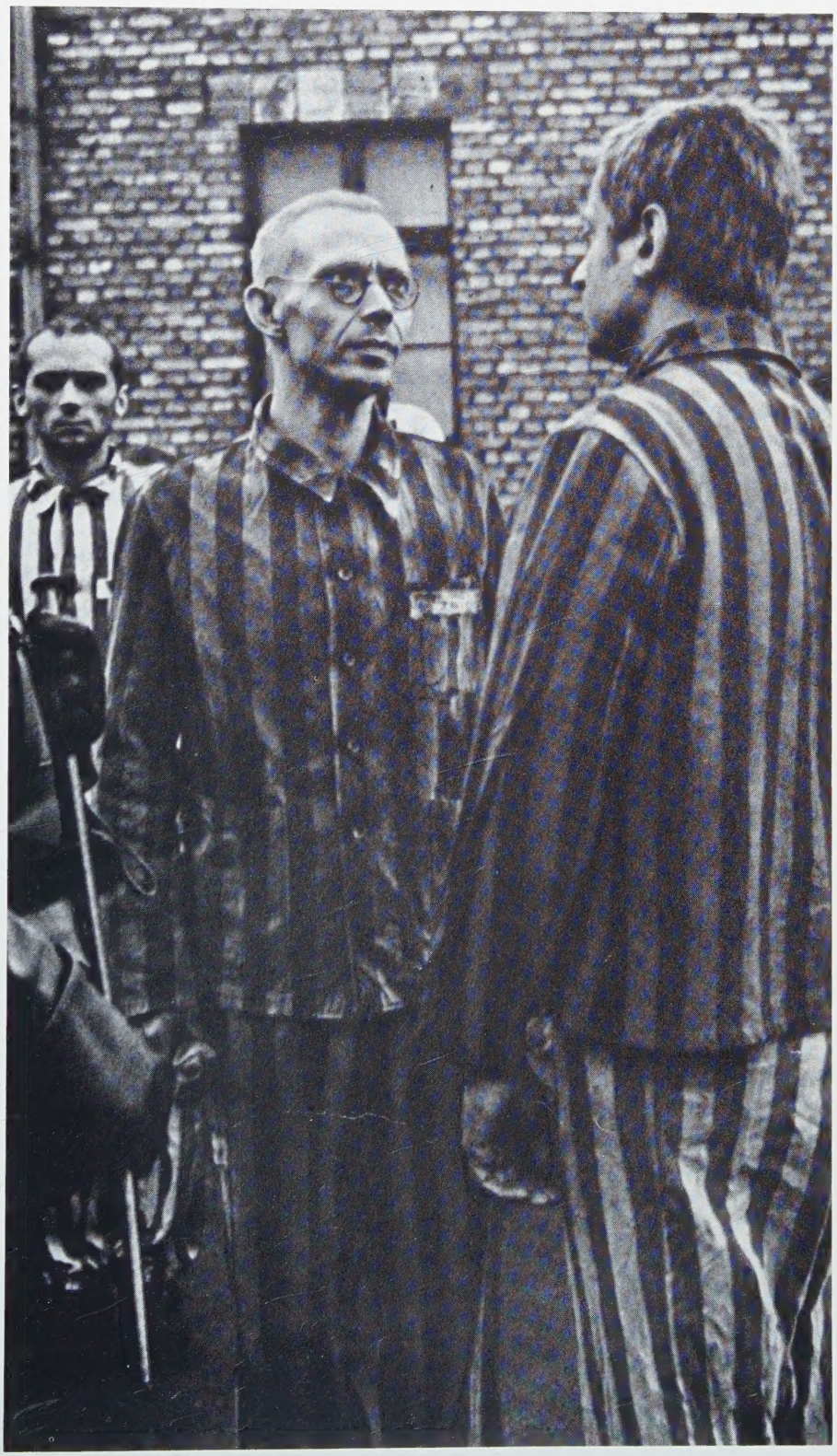
A dog's bark was heard from the marshland beyond the barbed wire fence. They've caught him!" Then, nothing. The hunt went on.

The minutes crawled by endlessly. One hour, then two.

With his hands behind his back, Fritsch marched ten steps forward, did an about-face, ten steps to the rear, an about-face, again and again, his heavy boots pounding the dirt with the regularity of a metronome.

At 9 p.m. sharp, Herr Fritsch stopped short in the middle of the quadrangle. He shouted an order that was relayed to every block: "Break ranks!" All except Block 14.

Soup was brought from the kitchens and the meagre rations were distributed. The large pot for Block 14 was brought out to the quadrangle where the prisoners still stood. There it was set before the starved men until the soup's fragrance made the saliva drip from their mouths. Then, as



"A man bearing number 16670 stepped boldly out of line." He wanted to speak with the Commandant. This dramatic moment (photo right) was relived in the film **From a far country** *directed by Poland's Krzysztof Zanussi.*

During his trip to Poland in July 1979, Pope John Paul II visited the extermination camp of Auschwitz. Visibly moved, the Holy Father prayed in the underground cell where Maximilian Kolbe with the other nine condemned men were sent to die of hunger and thirst.

the inmates looked on, the guards slowly poured the soup down a drain at the edge of the field.

Night had fallen when the prisoners of Block 14 were finally sent to their bunks, but no one slept. Hunger gnawed away at their stomachs, but the maddening fear, "Will it be my turn tomorrow?" was worse. It clawed away inside their minds. It was the third prison break in only a few days — ever since the prisoners had been assigned to the teams working outside the compound.

In both cases, Fritsch had proceeded to choose ten victims from the escapee's own block to die in the Starvation Bunker. "I'd gladly settle for the firing squad — or hanging. One second and it'd be over."

The next morning, all the prisoners were assembled in the quadrangle for the first roll call. Fritsch had the interpreter announce that the escapee had not been found.

Then one by one, the blocks, each with its armed escort, marched out through the camp gate to finish the harvest.

Block 14 was under orders not to move. Surrounded by steel-helmeted SS guards with leveled machine guns, these men who had already suffered months of scanty provisions and who had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, were again stood at attention, immobile beneath the hot summer sun that beat down more pitilessly with every passing hour.

The hours seemed like centuries as the sun burned on their shaved heads, their throats became more and more parched with thirst, their muscles became contorted with terrible cramps. At last some of the prisoners began to drop to the ground, exhausted. If they did not come to under the blows of the guards' boots, they were dragged by their feet to a corner of the quadrangle. As the hours passed, the pile of prisoners grew as they were heaped one on top of another. Those who still held up felt their faces swell, and their vision became blurred.

At three in the afternoon, there was a half-hour break and rations were finally distributed. Even this concession was part of Bullneck's calculations — a means of ensuring that everyone did not collapse before evening when all the blocks would be present.

As soon as the meal was over, the men of Block 14 were again lined up, and kept at attention until six o'clock when the other blocks returned. The usual procedure for roll call followed.

Commandant Fritsch received the reports of his lieutenants, then proceeded to where the prisoners of Block 14 were standing. Two paces behind him came *Raportführer* Palitsch, his adjutant and at a distance of a few yards, a semicircular cluster of heavily armed SS guards.

Fritsch loved to dramatize. From beneath the visor of his cap, steel-gray eyes glared out. With his feet planted far apart, his hands behind his back and his chin, neck and chest forming one continuous, rigid line, he stood before his victims in the deathly silence that fell upon the camp. Fritsch allowed himself a few minutes to enjoy the utter stillness, before breaking it with his announcement: "The fugitive has not been recovered. Therefore, ten of you must die in the Starvation Bunker."

"It's my turn this time. Oh my God, save me."

Fritsch walked slowly past the first row. "He's coming towards me, he's looking at me..." In the merciless silence the slow beat of his footsteps echoed off the barracks.

Lawyer Joseph Sobolewski, "Number 2877" assisted firsthand at the choice of which prisoners were to die in the Starvation Bunker: "It's hard to say on what basis he made his choice (both that time and the times before) because he wasn't really considering the age or physical condition of the prisoners. He passed through the rows, one by one, pointing out each victim he had chosen. That prisoner would then have to immediately step out from the ranks. An SS guard would escort him to the left wing of Block 14 where another guard would take him into custody and *Raportführer* Palitsch would mark down the prisoner's number on a sheet of paper until the death roster was complete."

"So long, friends," one of them called to all his comrades. "We'll meet again up there, where there's true justice!"

"Long live Poland!" a young man cried out. And then there was the prisoner who broke ranks, trembling from head to foot. Desperate, his head in his hands, he began to cry out through uncontrollable sobbing, "No, no, I don't want to die. My poor wife, my poor children, my poor orphans."

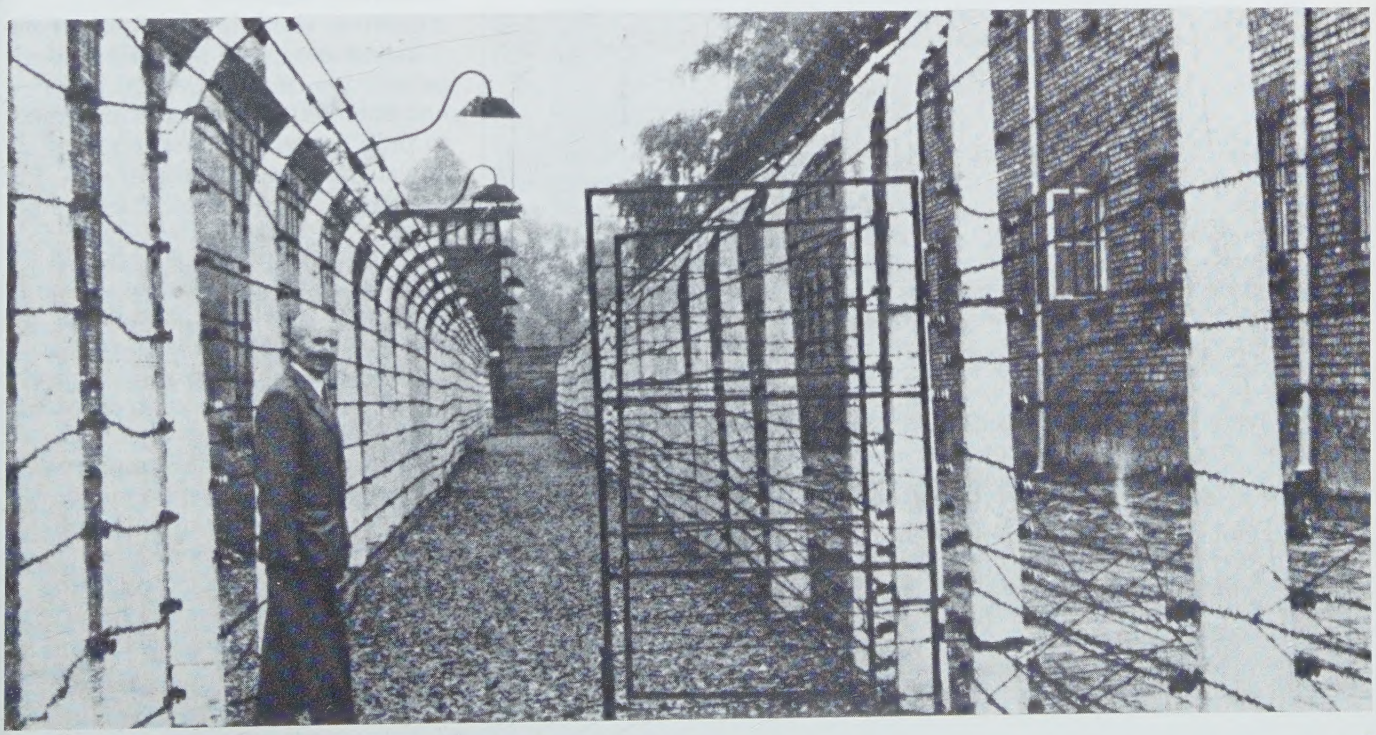
It was Francis Gajowniczek, "Number 5659," ex-sergeant of the Polish army.

"Take off your shoes!" the guard shouted to the ten prisoners. Ten pairs of wooden clogs clattered to the ground. This too was part of "Bullneck's" prescribed ritual: the victims were to go barefoot to their place of execution.

"In that moment," Gajowniczek himself later recounted, "I saw another prisoner step out of the ranks and walk over to the guard."

"Commandant Fritsch and the others were already walking away

Francis Gajowniczek, ex-sergeant of the Polish army who, because of Father Kolbe's sacrifice, escaped death in the Starvation Bunker of Auschwitz.



Milicya N. M. P. Niepokalanej
Starać się o nawrócenie grzeszników, he-
ków, schizmatyków itd. a najbardziej
poświęcenie wszystkich pod opiekę i za
Warunki: 1) Oddać się całkowicie N. M. P.

Maximilain Kolbe as a young clergyman studied philosophy and theology in Rome. In 1917 he founded the "Knights of Mary Immaculate" (above, his handwritten program of action for the Knights). Under his direction this movement developed widely all over the world, opening the way for a renewal of religious life.

from Block 14," Joseph Sobolewski reported, "when Father Kolbe moved forward. He told the guard that he wanted to speak to the Commandant."

Unheard of! Never before had a prisoner dared to ask such a thing. Neither had the Commandant ever before lowered himself to address a word to a "number" in his camp.

The guard snarled at Kolbe to get back into the ranks but Kolbe would not be intimidated. He repeated his request to speak to the Commandant. This too was unheard of... In the meantime the *Lagerführer's* SS escort, realizing what was happening, told the Commandant.

Immediately Fritsch turned around. "Father Maximilian moved swiftly towards him," Henry Sienkiewcz later recounted. Fritsch's hand moved to grasp his .38 revolver as a wave of whispers flew through the lines: "It's Father Kolbe!" "The Franciscan from Niepokalanow!" This incredible violation of Auschwitz's ironclad discipline was followed by another unprecedented fact — not one of the guards, accustomed to pulling the trigger whenever any suspicious movement occurred, fired a shot.

"Number 16670" stopped in front of the Commandant.

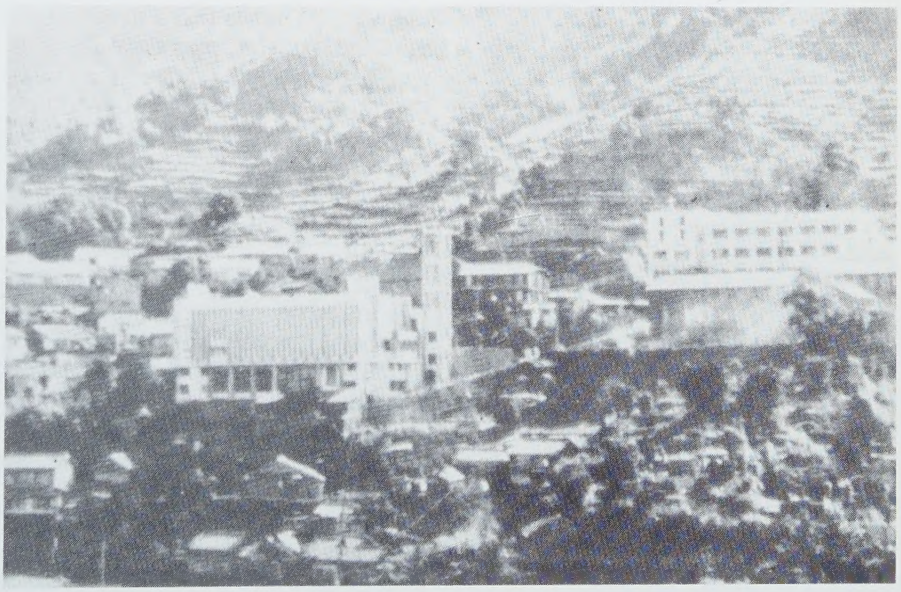
Doctor Wlodarski, and other eye witnesses would later recall: "He removed his hat and stood at respectful attention in front of the camp Commandant. "

"Standing straight as an arrow, his hands at his sides, he made his request in German," Joseph Sobolewski remembered.

The Commandant thought he hadn't understood it since the request was so inconceivable. "What do you want, you dirty Pole?" he asked.

TOP: In 1927, Father Kolbe was given land at Teresin near Warsaw, Poland. There he began to build "The City of the Immaculate."

BELOW RIGHT: The Japanese City of the Immaculate which was begun by Kolbe in 1931 near Mt. Hikoson - Nagasaki, Japan.



The interpreter confirmed that "Number 16670" had said exactly that: "I want to take the place of one of the condemned men."

"Have you gone crazy?" the Commandant shouted in Father Kolbe's face. "Why?"

Kolbe invoked an unwritten but basic statute of Nazi law: the sick and the weak must be eliminated.

"I am an old man, sir, and good for nothing. My life is no longer of use to anyone."

"In whose place do you want to die?"

"For him" and with his hand he pointed beyond the steel helmets of the SS guards to Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek, still sobbing, his head held in his hands. "He has a wife and two children. He . . ."

"And just who are you?" snapped Fritsch.

"A Catholic priest."

He didn't say "a religious" or "a Franciscan." He simply said "a priest." It was just enough information to give Fritsch a good pretext for reversing his decision since priests occupied one of the lowest "rungs" of the camp ladder.

"A priest!" sneered the *Lagerführer.* He signaled to Palitsch that the request had been approved.

"Get him out!" he shouted, indicating Gajowniczek.

"The guard moved over to the Polish sergeant," Alexander Dziuba recalled, "and with a kick shoved him back into the ranks of Block 14. Then he turned around and with another blow sent Father Kolbe over to the ranks of the condemned."

"Palitsch, in the meantime, crossed out number 5659, which was Gajowniczek's, and in its place on the list he wrote Father Kolbe's number: 16670. Everything was in order, the roster of victims was complete.

The whole camp was struck numb by the incident.

Sobolewski would later state: "Never before in the history of Auschwitz was there any record of a prisoner who had offered his own life in place of someone completely unknown to him."

Kolbe's heroic and unconditional act of love was to become a light for that moment, and for all times.

ATHENAGORAS

A PROPHET OF OUR TIMES

by ALBERT RAUCH

Ten years ago one of the greatest figures of contemporary Christianity died on July 6, 1972. He was Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople — a forerunner of ecumenism, preparing the way for unity.

In an interview with the French journalist Olivier Clement who was writing a book about him, Patriarch Athenagoras had this to say about himself: "What is there to say about me? And to what purpose? There was a man called Athenagoras who had a very long life. By himself he never achieved anything. He tried to love his fellow men, although he himself was no more than a grain of sand among millions of other grains of sand..."[1]

Like many important personalities in history, Athenagoras, too, had been prepared for the service of humanity by the various circumstances in his life.

Aristokles Spyrou — this was his given name — was born in 1886, the son of a country doctor. In the mountains of Epirus where he grew up, there flourished — as in other parts of the Balkans under Turkish rule, a multi-national civilization. Thus, since childhood, he was familiar with the problem of coexistence between Christians and Moslems, and was taught by his family to respect those whose thoughts, feelings and beliefs were different from his own.

From his early youth, the most powerful and intimate trait of his personality was a burning desire for the communion — the deepest possible unity — among all peoples.

His childhood was marked by a severe illness which kept him out of school for two years, and then by the death of his mother who, through her deep faith and kindness, had given him the sense of God's love that is stronger than death.

In September 1903, Aristokles was admitted to the school of Halki, near Istanbul, a school for the formation of Orthodox priests. It was there that he finished high school, studied theology and decided to enter the monastic life.

In March 1910 he took his final vows and was ordained a deacon. For his monastic life he chose the name Athenagoras, the name of the Archdeacon of the Phanar, his spiritual guide, to whom he had always looked as an example to follow.

As a young deacon, Athenagoras was assigned to the service of the Bishop of Monstir in Tunisia, and in no time his kindness, eagerness to serve, his availability to all the faithful, as well as his thorough theological preparation, earned him the esteem and affection of all.

In March 1919, after a six-month stay at Mount Athos, Athenagoras

(continued on page 12)

Picture of Athenagoras I, taken when he was Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

"TO FURTHER THE WAYS OF GOD"

Jerusalem, the Eve of the Epiphany, 1964. The seat of the Apostolic Delegation provides the background for a prophetic gesture: the embrace between Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Paul VI, during his first papal pilgrimage to the Holy Land. (The second meeting would take place in July 1967, at the Phanar in Istanbul.) During this memorable encounter, the Patriarch gave the Holy Father an "encolpion," the episcopal insignia in the Orthodox Church, bearing the image of the Blessed Virgin, while he himself received a golden chalice from the Pope. Very few people were aware of the simple and moving conversation which, without fanfare or formality, preceded the exchange of gifts. By a fortunate mistake, however, the cameras of the Italian television continued filming the entire scene, thus providing us with an unexpected and rare document. The exchange between these two great men reveals their intense desire for the same ideal of unity. Here is that conversation:[1]

After some initial noise, we hear the short greeting of Patriarch Athenagoras. The Pope, explaining that his English was not fluent enough, asked permission to speak in French: "It would be easier for me."

"Speak in French," the Patriarch agreed, and the conversation between the Pope and the Patriarch begins:

Pope: I wish to express to you my deep joy, how moved I am. I truly think we are living this moment in the presence of God.

Patriarch: In the presence of God. I too repeat it, in the presence of God...

Pope: And I have no other thought, as I talk with you, except the thought of talking to God.

Patriarch I am deeply moved, Your Holiness. Tears come to my eyes.

Pope: Since this is a true moment of God, we must live it with all the intensity, all the rectitude and all the desire...

Patriarch: ... to go ahead ...

Pope: ... to further the ways of God. Is there anything Your Holiness would like to tell me? Any desire I might be able to fulfill?

Patriarch: ... We have the same desire...

Pope: We represent two roads which perhaps are about to meet.

Patriarch: We have the same desire. When I read in the newspapers that you had decided to visit this country, I immediately thought of expressing my wish to meet you here, and I was sure that I would have an answer from Your Holiness...

Pope: ... a positive answer.

Patriarch: ... a positive answer, because I have a deep confidence in Your Holiness. I see you, and I am not trying to flatter you, I see you in the Acts of the Apostles, in the letters of Saint Paul, whose name you bear. I see you there, yes, I see you in ...

Pope: I speak to you as a brother: I want you to know that I have the same deep confidence in you. I think that Providence has chosen Your Holiness to carry ahead this plan.

Patriarch: I think that Providence has chosen Your Holiness to open the way of his ...

Pope: Providence chose both of us in order that we may understand each other.

Patriarch: The centuries have been waiting for you; centuries waiting for this day, for this great day ... What a joy in this city, what a joy at the Holy Sepulcher, what a joy on Golgotha, what a joy on the very road that yesterday you traveled ...

Pope: I am so filled with impressions that I shall need a long time to draw out and interpret all the wealth of emotions in my soul. I nevertheless do want to take advantage of this moment to assure you of the absolute loyalty I shall always have in my dealings with you.

Patriarch: I can assure you of the same on my part.

Pope: I will never conceal the truth from you.

Patriarch: I will always trust you.

Pope: I have no intention of misleading you or of taking advantage of your good will. I have no other wish than to go along God's path.

Patriarch: I have absolute confidence in Your Holiness. Absolute. Absolute.

Pope: I will make the utmost effort.

Patriarch: I shall always be at your side.

Pope: And I will always endeavor to deserve it. I want Your Holiness to know from this moment on, that I will not cease praying, every day, for Your Holiness and for the common intentions we share for the good of the Church.

Patriarch: We have received the gift of this great moment; we therefore will remain always together. We shall walk together. May God ... Your Holiness, Your Holiness sent by God ... the Pope with the big heart. Do you know what I call you? "*O megalocardos,*" the Pope with the big heart.

Pope: We are no more than humble instruments.

Patriarch: This is the way we must look at things.

Pope: The smaller we are, the more we are instruments. This means that it is God's action that must prevail and become the norm of all our actions. As for me, I remain docile, and I wish to be — as much as possible — obedient to the will of God and as understanding as possible towards you, Your Holiness, towards your brothers, and your environment.

Patriarch: I believe it. I have no need to ask, I believe it.

Pope: I know that this is not easy. I know that there are delicate points, that there is a mentality ...

Patriarch: ... that there is a psychology ...

Pope: But I also know that ...

Patriarch: ... on both sides...

Pope: ... there is a great sense of rectitude and the desire to love God, to serve the cause of Jesus Christ. It is on this that I place my confidence.

Patriarch: It is on this that I place my confidence. Together, together.

Pope: I do not know whether this is the moment, but I see what should be done, namely to study the issues together or delegate someone who ...

Patriarch: On both sides...

Pope: And I would like to know what Your Holiness and your Church think about the constitutions of the Church. It is the first step ...

Patriarch: We will follow your opinions.

Pope: I will tell you what I think to be correct, as derived from the Gospel, from the will of God, and from authentic tradition. I will express my belief. And if there will be points that do not coincide with your ideas about the Church's contribution ...

Patriarch: I will do the same ...

Pope: We shall discuss it, we shall try to find the truth ...

Patriarch: The same will be true on our part, and I'm sure that we shall always be together.

Pope: I hope that this will be easier than we think.

Patriarch: We will do everything possible.

Pope: There are two or three doctrinal points which have undergone on our part, an evolution, due to the advancement of studies. We will present the reasons for this evolution and submit them to you and to your theologians' consideration. We do not want to insert anything artificial or of secondary importance in what we believe to be the authentic thought.

Patriarch: In the love of Jesus Christ.

Pope: Another thing — which may seem of secondary importance but which actually has its importance — in everything concerning discipline, honors, prerogatives and privileges; I am totally ready to listen to what Your Holiness holds to be best.

Patriarch: The same is true on my part.

Pope: There should be no question of prestige, of primacy, that has not been established by Christ. Absolutely nothing on the matter of honors and privileges. Let us see what Christ asks of us, and each one will take his own position, but without any human ambition to prevail, to have glory and advantages. Only to serve.

Patriarch: You are dear to me in the depth of my heart ...

Pope: ... only to serve.

When, after reciting the Our Father, they took leave of each other, the Patriarch said: "Yes, like this, hand in hand forever."

1) Ange, Daniel, "Uno Sguardo Profetico," vol. 1 (Milan: Ancor).

Istanbul, July 25, 1967. Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, as they leave the Phanar, residence of the Patriarch. Earlier they had taken part in a common liturgy in the Orthodox Church of St. George, where they prayed together for unity.

January 6, 1964. Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem, reading together the words of Christ: "That all may be one."

(continued from page 8)

was appointed first secretary of the Holy Synod, and four years later, was named Bishop of Corfu. In later years various circumstances brought him to the United States where, from 1930 to 1948, he was head of the Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America. It was during this period that he became friends with two United States' presidents: Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry Truman.

In 1948 Athenagoras was elected Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, and his first endeavor in his new position was to seek a reconciliation between the Greeks and the Turks. The crisis in Cyprus, however, crushed all his hopes. It was a trial similar to the proverbial tribulation of Job. Due to his absolute loyalty towards the Turkish State, the Greeks accused him of betraying the national cause; while the Turks, pointing to his refusal to condemn the Cypriot Archbishop Makarios, labeled him a secret supporter of the political movement for Cyprus' annexation to Greece.

But the Patriarch was not easily discouraged. His vocation, as he saw it, was to serve the cause of unity. He had a clear vision of "a universal republic in which Christians would be the leaven, and where every person and every nation would find its own place — a vision of the great brotherhood of the peoples of Christ, which Dostoyevsky had proclaimed on the tomb of Pushkin."

Athenagoras sought out many avenues to pursue and advance this aspiration of his heart. In 1926 he participated, as Bishop of Corfu, at an ecumenical youth meeting held in Helsinki, and organized primarily through the initiative of the Evangelical Church. As the Patriarch of the Greek-Catholic communion (as the Greek Orthodox faithful define themselves), he was particularly anxious to reopen, after centuries of silence, the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, preparing dialogues and gatherings.

It was a difficult road he embarked upon at a time when both confessions were still searching for unity within their own ranks. Furthermore, Athenagoras was no stranger to the challenge of today's atheism which can be met only by the unity of the faithful through the realization of Jesus' last commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you." For this reason, he continued, undaunted, to offer signs of this love, particularly wherever he felt there was the possibility of finding common ground.

In this way frequent contacts developed with the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians established by Pope John XXIII and, which was at that time, under the leadership of Cardinal Bea. These contacts gathered even greater momentum under the pontificate of Pope Paul VI who, immediately after his election, wrote to the Patriarch: "That task entrusted to us by the Lord... prompts us to give particular care to all that implies the re-unification of Christians, and which can contribute toward its realization so that the perfect communion among them may once more be achieved..."

A few months later, in January 1964, the historical encounter of Pope Paul VI and Athenagoras I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople took place in Jerusalem. It was followed in 1965 by the mutual cancellation of the excommunication act of 1054, which although in itself had never been put into effect officially, was carried out in practice (*de facto*). This new relationship between the two sister Churches was characterized by words, gestures and actions which expressed a genuine, fraternal, Christian love, and formed the basis for an ecumenical dialogue.

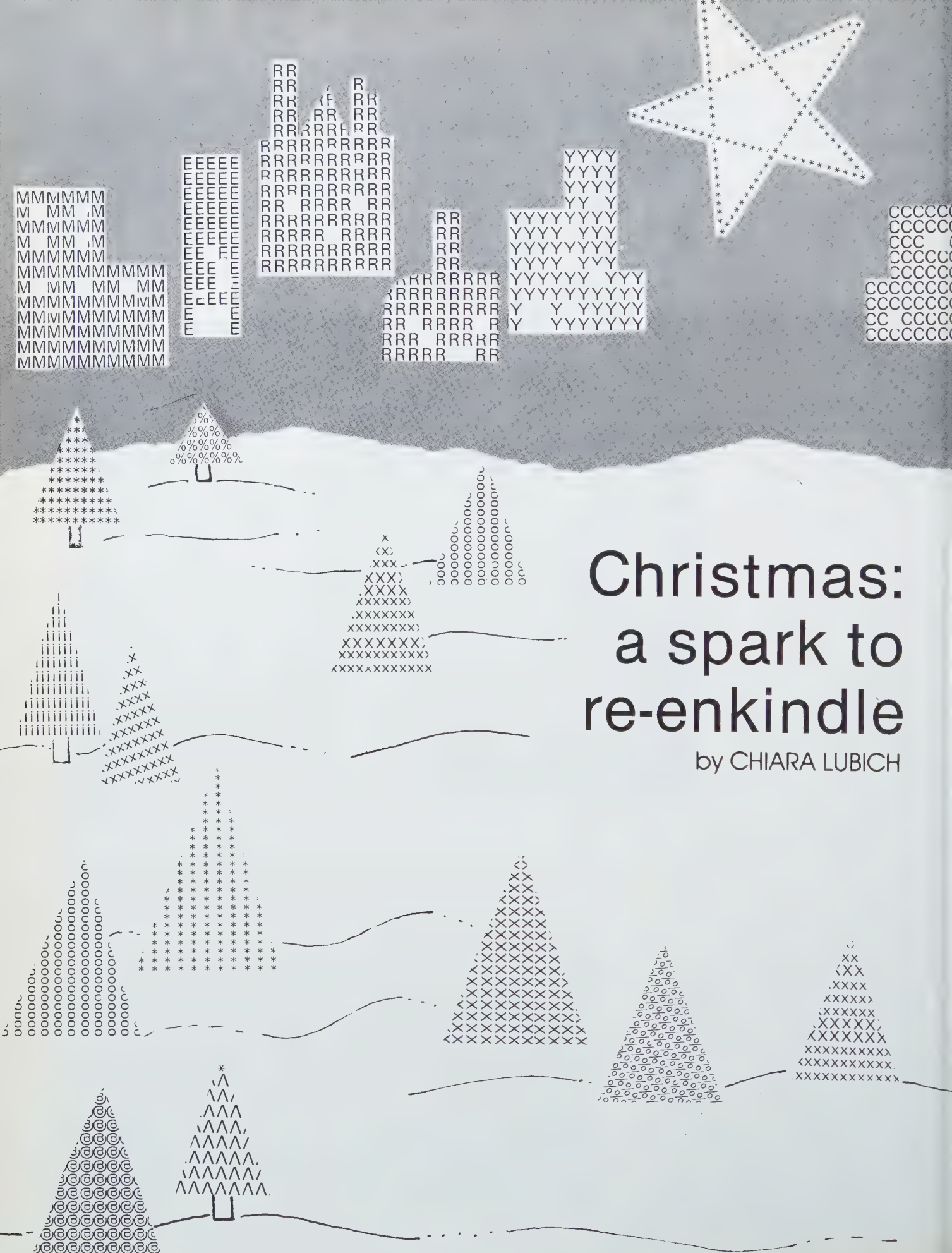
Chiara Lubich paid several visits to the Patriarch. Above: Chiara with the Patriarch in his studio in the Phanar in April, 1970.

Today, after both these great personalities of Christianity have left us, the work of reunification proceeds so normally that public opinion is no longer aware of what it has entailed. In 1979, during his fourth trip abroad, Pope John Paul II took the occasion to visit Patriarch Demetrius I, successor of Athenagoras, at the Phanar in Istanbul. And in May 1980, on the island of Patmos, the theological dialogue between the two sister Churches was inaugurated. Thus, in the face of all the difficulties and obstacles, the ecumenical dialogue continues to be built, brick by brick. The ideal of unity for which Patriarch Athenagoras had lived and worked with all his strength, is his legacy for us; it is both the hope and duty of all Christians today.

Chiara Lubich, who met Patriarch Athenagoras several times, shared her impression of this great figure of our times in an interview for the Italian Television.

In 1967 I was granted the grace of meeting with Athenagoras for the first time, having been asked by him to go and see him. It was an experience a little bit out of the ordinary, because the Patriarch was a man of incredible spiritual stature. In him I saw what love is: he loved in an extraordinary way — in the small, minute matters, as well as in the big ones. His heart was great enough to embrace the world and all the Churches. After the visit of Pope Paul VI to Istanbul, I found him always more oriented towards unity with the Catholic Church.

He was the one who opened the way for the Focolare Movement in the Orthodox world. I remember a sentence he often repeated: "The day will come, the sun will rise high in the heavens, the angels will sing and dance, and all of us, patriarchs and bishops will gather around the Holy Father to celebrate in the one chalice."



Christmas: a spark to re-enkindle

by CHIARA LUBICH

All one. It is a goal to reach. It is a commandment: a commandment given by the One each person should joyfully obey. God is our father. If heaven opened up and he spoke to each one of us most likely he would say, "All one! You are all brothers and sisters; therefore be united."

One day heaven did open up because the Word became man, grew up, taught, performed miracles, gathered disciples, founded the Church and, before dying on the cross, he said to the Father, "...that all may be one." He did not say this to those around him, they might not have understood him. He addressed this to the Father because the bond of this unity is God. He obtained for us the grace to be able to become one.

We Christians speak a lot about unity, the Mystical Body, the Church, but often — and this is absurd — while we think we know and under stand these realities, we don't live them.

We know that a bond ties us together, we know we are brothers and sisters, but we don't act as such. We pass by each other without looking at one another, without helping one another, without loving one another. But what then is the meaning of our brotherhood?

Of course, if we are living in grace, God is already our bond, but there is more that he wants from us. He wants us to open our eyes and look at each other. He wants us to help and love one another. He wants us to love the others as *ourselves* — no less than this.

But who does this today? And yet, Jesus said it. Is it possible that only the saints live the Gospel? What then do Christians do? They try, when they can, not to do wrong and, when they feel like it, to do some good.

This is not what Jesus wanted.

If we turn these words into life, loving all those we meet as Jesus would love them, each one of us will set off a spark of the Christian revolution. This revolution means to lead all people — through love — to recognize that they are all brothers and sisters and to treat each other accordingly.

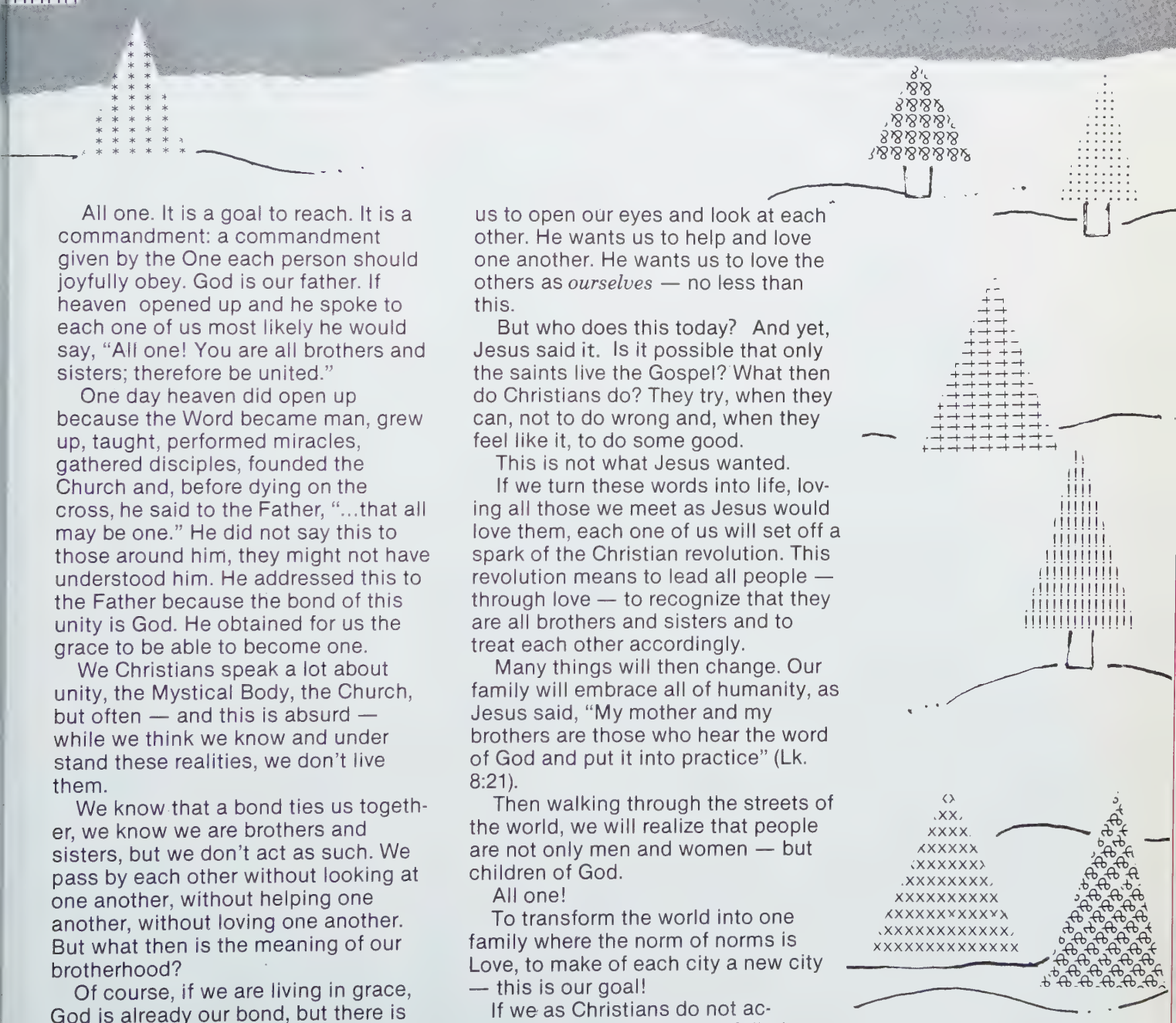
Many things will then change. Our family will embrace all of humanity, as Jesus said, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk. 8:21).

Then walking through the streets of the world, we will realize that people are not only men and women — but children of God.

All one!

To transform the world into one family where the norm of norms is Love, to make of each city a new city — this is our goal!

If we as Christians do not accomplish this, we will have failed.



If I want to live unity

The following experience was shared at the 1982 Mariapolis by one of the participants. It is an experience of unity lived in the community.

My next-door neighbor is a very nice person, but I never thought we had anything in common except the fact that we both had children. Her daughter is one year older than our oldest daughter, so many times she would come over and ask my opinion on the things that come up every day in raising children. I used to try to make myself one with her, putting aside everything in order to listen to her. One day I was in a bit of a hurry trying to get supper ready when the doorbell rang. I thought: "No matter who it is I'll tell them to go away and I'll talk to them later." It was this neighbor. When I opened the door and I saw there I thought that If I wanted to live unity I could not turn her away. In her Jesus was coming to visit me.

As we sat down, she started crying, and she told me that she and her husband had many difficulties. The relationship between them had gotten to be so bad that the only solution they could think of was to separate. As she was talking, at first I was overwhelmed by the whole situation and did not know what to say. Then I realized that all I had to do was to listen as I had done when she shared the little problems of her daughter. She spoke at length about her husband's job which took him often out of town, of the little time they had together, of his disagreeing about almost anything she did and so on. It had gotten to such a point, she said, that also the little girl was being affected in school.

Then another thing suddenly came up in the midst of this conversation. She was not too close to the Church but now she said she felt a need to go back to it. Her husband saw it as another point of disagreement, but she felt inside she wanted to go back to Mass. She was very confused and afraid that this step in her life would be the final blow to the already shaky family situation. As she was talking I kept reminding myself that it was useless to try to think of a solution. She had it within her. I only had to continue making myself one with her and her suffering, without worrying about my unfinished dinner and the children getting wild around us. Then came the moment I had been fearing from the beginning. She stopped and asked me what she should do. I asked Jesus to give me the answer that he would give her if he were in my place. Then I found it easy to tell her that perhaps it was Jesus knocking at her door. She looked at me and said that it made sense, but it would be really hard to follow through. She left, and placing all in God's hands, I returned to my chores.

The following Sunday she called and her voice sounded really happy, the happiest it had been in a long time. She said she wanted to tell me she had just come back from Church. "I haven't been so happy for quite a while and I wanted to thank you for helping me," she said. "My husband doesn't think it is a good idea, but I really feel a joy that I don't know where it comes from."

A couple of months later, their daughter made her First Communion, and because the mother had been going, the two of them started going together to Mass. The husband, who used to sit home on Sunday mornings by himself, realized that it wasn't the wife who was dividing the family at this point and started accompanying her and his daughter to church.

There were other problems in the marriage, however. One of them was the difficulty between my friend and her husband's parents. They seemed to criticize everything that she was doing, and they told her right to her face. It had gotten to be so bad that if she knew that her in-laws were calling she

wouldn't answer the phone any more. This is how I became involved in this situation. One morning I had just made a plan for the day when my neighbor appeared at the door. Again it was to put aside all my plans and be available to her. This time she shared her problems with her in-laws again. There were many things which had really hurt her deeply, but also things that she had done to hurt them deeply. It was mutual. As she was talking, I tried to be empty of everything, even suggestions in order to listen. At the end she said: "I would like to do something to get together with my in-laws again, but I don't think there is anything I can do." Humanly speaking, I thought to myself it really seemed to be like that. Suddenly, however, I remembered that during the conversation she had mentioned that her in-laws would celebrate their wedding anniversary in a couple of weeks. "Why not throw an anniversary party for them?" I told her. It really seemed to be a wild idea, but at this point she believed in my love. She knew I had lived her problems as if they were mine and she decided she would do it if I helped her. We started right away with the guest list, the menu, etc. We worked hard in the next two weeks preparing her house, doing the shopping and other things. When the day of the anniversary came and her in-laws walked into her house, they were so surprised and touched by the love she had put into all of the preparations that they were overwhelmed. A couple of days later each of them wrote her a note to thank her. For the first time in the thirteen years she had been married, they referred to one another as mom and dad, which something that really touched her.

Things are getting better next door and the joy of my neighbor is mine. **N. F.**

THE DALAI LAMA VISITS THE HOLY FATHER

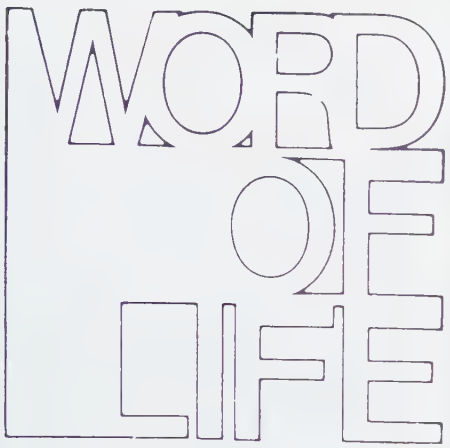
On September 28, 1982 the Dalai Lama Tenzin, spiritual leader of 6 million buddhists of Tibet, met for the second time with Pope John Paul II. "The Pope and I have the same goal," the Dalai Lama said, "to work for the happiness of all mankind; we walk together on this path. In an atmosphere of harmony we exchanged ideas about the work that could be done by all the different religions and spiritual movements in the world, on the possibility of working together, and on how religions could contribute to peace of mind — that of the spirit and of the world."

Images FOR words

Photo courtesy of Italian Cultural Institute

"First keep the
peace within
yourself,
then you can also
bring peace
to others."

Thomas A Kempis



"Make ready
the way of the Lord,
clear him a straight path"

(Lk.3:4).

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path."

During this season of Advent we are invited to live a new word of life. The Evangelist Luke takes it from the book of Isaiah. The first Christians had applied it to John the Baptist who had preceded Jesus.

The Church, in the period before Christmas, presents us with the figure of John the Baptist, inviting us to rejoice because he is like the messenger announcing the king who is about to come. The time is coming in which God will fulfill his promises, forgive sins and grant salvation.

"Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path."

While this word of life is an expression of joy, it is also an invitation to a complete and radical change of direction in our life. John the Baptist invites us to prepare the way of the Lord — but what is the way?

Jesus' coming was proclaimed by John the Baptist but before entering public life to begin his ministry he spent some time in the desert. That was his way. There in the desert he found profound union with God but he also encountered temptation and by experiencing that, he made himself one with all of us. He came out of it victorious. We will see Jesus follow this way again in his death and resurrection. Since Jesus followed his way to the end, he himself has become "the way" for us who are still on the road.

He is "the way" we must follow in order to fulfill our vocation as human beings, which is to enter into full communion with God.

Each of us is called to prepare the way of the Lord who wants to enter into our life; and we must make the paths of our life straight so that he can come in.

We have to prepare the way for him, removing every obstacle one by one, such as those arising from our limited way of seeing things, from our weak will.

We need courage to choose between our way and his way for us, between our will and his will, between a program we have thought of (which, naturally, may not always turn out) and the one created by his all-powerful love.

Once we have made the decision, we have to work at breaking our own stubborn will and doing his.

When should we do it? Those who have become fulfilled Christians, the saints, teach us a good, practical, intelligent method: do it right now. Moment by moment let us try to remove the obstacles that keep us from doing his will so that it is no longer our will living in us, but his.

In this way we will have lived the word of life:

"Make ready the way of the Lord, clear him a straight path."

CHIARA LUBICH

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

A MATTER OF LIFE

I am a physician and work in the operating room. One day an emergency code was called for one of the operating rooms where there was trouble with the patient and help was needed. I ran there and so did several of the doctors. The operation was over but the child's breathing was obstructed: no air was getting through, so that he was turning blue and his pulse was getting weaker and slowing down. Several doctors tried to establish an airway, but were unsuccessful. It was such a tense moment with the life of the child at stake. I remembered the word of life for that month: "Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid" (Mt.14:27).

I asked God's help, took a breathing tube, and placed it in the child's nose and moved it down his throat. He started to breath easily, pinked up and his pulse got stronger and faster. The other doctors were amazed at how I did it. I knew in my heart that God was with me and had guided my hand to do what was right and save the child's life.

L.R.

TO BE ONE AT ANY COST

I felt that I wanted to live the word of life intensely, especially at home. My daughter likes to play with her doll and she invites me to play with her but I have always had many things to do. It seemed to me that it would be a waste of time but then I remembered the word of life we were trying to live that month: "For the weak I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost" (l Cor.9:22).

I changed my attitude and made myself one with her. Together we made a dress for her doll and my daughter was very happy. The next day she asked me if I could wake her up early because she wanted to go to Mass with me.

D.S.

THE SECOND THOUGHT

I am a college student and therefore have a chance to socialize with many young people. All the students in my program are on friendly terms with each other and we often do things together as a group. One girl however is often depressed and my classmates have been avoiding her as a result.

At the beginning of the year I had tried to love this fellow student despite her moods, often inviting her to our table in the cafeteria and going home with her on the subway, but I found that after a while I was becoming discouraged too.

Although I did not intentionally ignore her, I didn't seek out her company as often as before.

At one point, I tried to rationalize my actions by thinking that I was only encouraging her to focus on her problems by willingly listening to them. But I did not feel comfortable with this solution. Then I remembered the word of life we were living that month: "For the weak I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost" (1Cor.9:22). I knew then that it was especially with this girl that I had to make myself one.

So the next day I began anew by listening to all the dilemmas that had befallen my friend the previous weekend. There were quite a few of them, but I tried to make each one of them mine and she seemed relieved at the end of our conversation.

As each day passed and I continued with my attempts to make myself one with her, my friend no longer spoke only about her problems.

We began to do fun things together — going out to a show or to her favorite restaurant. When I had to hastily move to a new residence, she offered to help me paint and even provided the paint for me. I knew that she had a lot of work to do that night but I understood from what she said that she really wanted to help me out.

The end of the month arrived and I decided that I really wanted to live the word of life to its fullest all day long. That day was particularly busy for me since I had to finish many assignments. I planned to use all my spare time to do just that but halfway through the day my

friend approached me and asked me if I would help her with her assignment which she had yet to start.

My first reaction was to tell her that I was too busy and that she should not have left it until the last minute. Fortunately a second thought immediately followed, telling me that this was really Jesus asking me for help. With this realization, I placed my work aside and answered her, "Certainly," with a big smile.

After I had finished explaining the assignment to her, my friend thanked me for all my help and left with the comment: "You know, I always wonder where you get your optimism." I know someday, soon, I will have a chance to share with her the secret of my optimism.

M.F.

FINDING THE RIGHT WAY

One day I went to visit an old friend of mine in the hospital. Her daughter, who is about 22 years old was also there. At one time I had had a very good relationship with this daughter, but during the years I felt that it had been strained a little, maybe because her life style had changed, or perhaps her ideas were not as they had been before. In any case I often felt that we had grown distant from each other, especially in the last few years. So when I greeted her in the hospital I made a special effort to give her a big and warm hello.

I tried several times to start a conversation with her, but each time I felt it wasn't going too well. I really wanted her to feel my love, but it seemed that everything I said was not quite right. After awhile I realized that I was not really making myself one with her. I was so determined to love her my way that I realized she was feeling very uncomfortable. The word of life we were living that month came to my mind immediately: "For the weak I made myself weak. I made myself all things to all men in order to save some at any cost" (1Cor.9:22).

It seemed that right away I understood how to love her. The T.V. had been on all the time I was in the room with her. It appeared to me that she really wanted to watch a certain serial program. In fact, I realized that she kept glancing up at it off and on all the time we were talking, and I had been trying to distract her from it with my conversation. Instead, in order to really love her and make myself one with her in what interested her I began to ask her questions about the people on the screen. (That particular program was on everyday at the same time.)

Well my friend began to tell me all about each character in the story as well as the plot. You could see how happy she was that I had been interested enough in her program to ask her about it.

After a short while she stopped looking at the T.V. and began a conversation with me. It turned out to be beautiful. I could sense that our relationship was on a deeper level and we talked about many things. When I left she gave me a very warm smile and thanked me over and over again for coming to the hospital.

R.B.

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The young and the Gospel

Early in the morning a friend of my father called and wanted to talk to him. I got mad at my father's friend because it wasn't time for me to wake up and once I woke up I couldn't get back to sleep any more. My father was still asleep so I went back to the phone. Then I remembered how to love Jesus in your brothers so I talked to him gracefully and I was very happy.

Stella
10 years old

One day when my family went to the store, my mom bought me a candy bar. My cousin wanted a piece. I tried to cut it in half, but it came out as a big piece and a little piece. My cousin wanted the big piece but I said no because I wanted the big piece. Then I saw Jesus in him so I gave him the big piece.

Claudia
9 years old

One day I was playing a game with my brother. He was making sure to point out every mistake I made. When he started making mistakes I wanted to do the same thing to him. But then I remembered whatever I did to him I would be doing to Jesus.

So I started to tell him all the good moves he made and what a good player he was. He noticed this and I got the hundredfold when he began complimenting me.

Amy
14 years old

Last week we got a new puppy which was a stray in the street. My mother said maybe we could keep him. One day my mother went to the store. When she came back she found the flowerpot was overturned and dirt was all over the place. The dog had also eaten the leaves from another plant. My mother got really mad and said we were getting rid of the puppy. I was going to complain, but instead I kept quiet because I knew my mother didn't need me complaining on top of everything. I decided to love. So far it's been the hundredfold because we still have the puppy.

Greg
13 years old

I went to my cousin's graduation party. I saw another cousin of mine that I never talked to or even met before. But even if I never talked to them before, I entertained them until we were all happy playing. So I was filled with joy when I came home because I loved even if just a little.

Stella
10 years old

One night my Daddy came home from work very tired. He was so tired that he told me we couldn't go to the Indian Princess meeting and asked me not to be disappointed. I hugged him and cried a little. But then I tried to love my Daddy and not make him feel bad. I tried not to feel bad that night.

The next day I got the hundred-fold because I was invited to play at my friend's house after school.

Clare
7 years old

I missed half a day of school one day. Before I went to sleep that night I started to worry about how I was going to get all the work done the next day. I told my mom about this and she reminded me to live the present moment like the Gen try to do and I asked God to help me.

The next day when I went into the classroom I looked at all the assignments on the board and I realized I hadn't missed too much work. I was glad I tried to live the present moment and didn't waste time worrying.

Geoffrey
9 years old

We were playing softball and some of my friends said the other team cheated. The game was over. First I felt like saying that they cheated too because we lost the game, but right away I remembered that I have to love them because I always remember, "the more you love your neighbor, the more you love Jesus." So instead of criticizing them I just said "nice game," and they smiled at me.

Stella
10 years old

One day, it was Friday afternoon. I was using my new earphones. Then my sister came and asked me if she could use my earphones. I said "no" because she would break them, but then I saw Jesus in her so I let her use my earphones.

Another day my sister asked me if she could write on my chalkboard. I said "no" because she would press on my chalk and when she would erase it there would still be marks on the chalkboard. But I saw Jesus in her so I let her write on my chalkboard and she was happy.

Claudia
9 years old

One day at lunch in school after we ate we went outside. My friends wanted to wait for one of my friends' mother. I didn't want to but I did to love Jesus in them.

Mary
7 years old

At school we are doing a play and I am on the art committee. We had to draw faces. I got to draw an easy face and my friend had to draw the hardest one so I helped him and he helped me. Before the day was over we had finished both pictures.

Peter
9 years old

FAMILY LIFE

FOLLOWING HIS PLAN

Don: This summer my wife and I and our four children went to San Diego, California on vacation since all of our close relatives live there. Soon after our arrival I caught the flu; for a couple of days I was confined to bed. As I felt better the following Sunday, Ann and I went over to my parents' house, where I thought I would relax in the morning, and then in the afternoon we would atttend a picnic my parents had prepared for about thirty Vietnamese people. (Let me make an aside about this: my father had met the Focolare a few years ago, and he realized he had to make a choice of God and then put his talents at the service of his fellow human beings — Vietnamese people who lived in his neighborhood. Now he wanted his Vietnamese friends to meet his son and daughter-in-law, and he and my mother had prepared this party.)

So I thought: "Well, I can rest a lot at my parents' home during the morning in order to be able to attend the picnic in the afternoon." On arriving, we found my parents very much upset. My father's best friend had suffered a heart attack and his wife had just called. This family lived on the other side of town and Mom and Dad were in no condition to drive over there. Even though I wasn't feeling well, in order to love my parents, I immediately offered to drive them.

When we arrived my father almost collapsed. My mother took him back home, and I drove our friend's wife to the hospital. When we got there, the doctor came out to say that he had not been able to save our friend's life; he had died. It was quite a shock for the wife and for me too! Again it was a matter of making a new choice, forgetting about myself and remaining there in the hospital to help her in that tragic situation.

Ann: My part of the story begins here: everybody had gone away in a hurry and I was left home with the children. I began wondering what in fact had happened, "Was it really a heart attack? How was he doing?" After an hour or an hour and a half went by, I was very anxious to call them on the phone so that I would know what had happened. But then I realized how sad my mother and father-in-law must have been at that moment, in that situation. I knew that I had to put my own curiosity and wondering aside and not bother them with a call at that moment. Finally, my mother-in-law called to tell me that their friend had died and that she would be spending the rest of the day with his wife. She asked if I would go ahead with this big picnic for the Vietnamese families.

I sort of gulped wondering how in the world could I go ahead with this picnic all by myself. I knew I would be the only one there with all those people whom I had never met before. Half of them didn't even speak English! I didn't want to do it at all, but listening to the voice of God in my heart, I knew that it wasn't enough that I loved my mother-in-law, but that in order to be love for her, I had to go ahead with this plan. I assured her that I would take care of everything. Not only did I have to say "yes," but I had to say it with enthusiasm!

Don: I came home from the hospital and went out to the picnic. I have to admit that it was something very difficult for me. It was a very joyful time for all my parents' friends, but deep down inside I was suffering. So I had to let go of my sadness, accept it and come out of myself in order to be love for those people. As it turned out, it was the hundredfold: those people were very lovable and I had a very good time. Perhaps it was just what I needed in that moment. They took over for me; understanding the traumatic experience of our family, they helped us in more than one way. For example, we had a flat tire on our car and they fixed it in no time.

Ann: The picnic was over; it was evening. We then realized that the daughter of our deceased friend was arriving from New Mexico by plane. At that point Don was very sick again and could not go out; my father-in-law was very, very tired and could not go out either; my mother-in-law was with the wife.

Thus, I was the only one left to drive to the airport. I had met this girl only a few times, and on those occasions I had felt very ill at ease around her. I began thinking that I was not really the best person to go out and pick her up at the airport. I didn't know what I would say to her. I knew I would feel uncomfortable around her and I thought that I was the last person she would want to see at such a sad time. But once again I knew I had to put aside what I felt and do what was most love in that situation.

I went to the airport, and immediately there was seemingly a bond between us. I managed to say what I hoped was something consoling to her in those moments. God really worked through me and gave her the support she needed at that time. In fact, long after the vacation had ended my mother-in-law sent me a letter in which she wrote that this girl had told her that I was the right person to have been with her at that particular moment. The truth is, it wasn't so much that it was I but rather someone who was able to love her first, and she had felt that.

D. & A. M.

THE FAMILY TASK

About two weeks ago our television set broke down and, as a favor, my brother-in-law has been working on it a little as a time every few days. In the meantime he let us use his small black and white portable so that our children and the children my wife babysits could watch their afternoon children's program.

Last week the small black and white went out also. The following evening I had a few hours of free time so I decided to have a look at it. As I was painstakingly removing and marking tubes and sockets, three of our smaller children were very inquisitive about what I was doing. My first impulse was to send them away so that I could do this tedious work in peace. But something inside me told me to leave them be and let them ask questions and touch and point and even let them hold things for me; to let them feel as though they were needed and useful and part of my life.

I decided that I wanted to build mutual love and unity among us at all costs. The whole project became a family task rather than "daddy's task." I discovered that by putting myself and my ideas aside the children and I became better friends.

R.B.

A MUCH STRONGER UNITY

Our ten-year-old son, Michael, is a happy boisterous boy, interested in everyone and everything. He likes to talk, too. One day in school, however, he had been talking the whole morning long. At noon, when I arrived to work in the school lunch program his teacher approached me

with a distressed look on her face. She told me that my son had continued to talk even while she was teaching. After warning him several times, she had sent him to the principal's office. She and I had previously agreed to work together in trying to help Michael gain self-control, and now she wanted me to know the circumstances leading up to this severe punishment. Evidently on this particular morning, the class had ended up listening more to him than to the lesson.

As I listened, my heart sank. Michael had really disappointed me. I felt hurt, angry and embarassed. At home he had been telling us that he was improving, and my husband and I had believed him. Now I was learning that for about two weeks, he had been getting worse, and his teacher, wanting to give him a chance to improve, had not told us.

I felt that I would have to say something to Michael immediately. The first 58 children were noisily coming into the lunch room and I found myself growing only more angry. Then I remembered that what I had to do was to love: to love first of all the suffering I felt inside, recognizing it as an aspect of Jesus' suffering, and then to love my son and his teacher. A sense of peace returned inside of me. I knew then that I would be able to speak to Michael with love. I cut my worries out of my mind and plunged into taking care of the fifty-eight children in front of me.

That evening while my husband and I were talking, we resolved to love each other and Michael more so that we would be able to help him as Jesus would. I knew that it would not be easy because my husband and I have very different personalities and we also have very different ways of understanding Michael. One thing I knew was that I wanted to build and to keep unity in my family at any cost to my own ideas or ego.

After dinner my husband and I took Michael aside and told him that we love him very much, that his teacher loves him, and that we all were very disappointed in his behavior. We asked him to tell us what had happened. Since Michael tries to live like a gen[1] he realized that he hadn't been doing the will of God. At once he admitted how hard it is for him to stop talking.

As we went over this problem I often found myself wanting to interrupt, but I would quiet my ego by saying to myself, "Jesus, to love you I only have now." Then, empty of my objections I was able to listen to both my husband and our son completely, all the way to the end of their thoughts.

My husband and I decided to try and help Michael by reminding him of his resolution every morning for a few days and in this way we would help him with his struggle for more self-control. He agreed to share his successes and failures at the end of each day.

Some time has passed and things are improving, and I experienced how this painful situation helped to build a much stronger unity in our family.

S.T.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

One day I was about to tell my brothers and sisters to do their chores because they were watching TV. Then I thought that I'd do my work, because it was the will of God for me too, so I did. I finished and saw that they were still watching TV. I didn't know what to do — should I turn the TV off and tell them it was time for their chores? Then I remembered that the most important thing was to love them. And I could love them by being one with them and doing what they felt like doing, which was to watch TV. So I sat and watched T V with my brothers and sisters. It was the hundredfold for me because I guess they felt my love for them. They started to say, "I think we'd better do our chores now." And they did.

E.O.

TIME STOPPED

Having two older girls and four other children besides, it seems that there is never enough of me to go around. I feel like I always fall short of spending time alone with each of them and their needs.

Recently my second oldest girl was having a problem and was rather quiet and distant. One evening, I was getting ready to go to a meeting so time was short. My oldest daughter was not at home, so my second oldest was going to babysit. As I was giving her instructions before I left, she still was very quiet and didn't seem to be paying attention to me. All I could think about was getting to my meeting on time. Yet inside I knew that I couldn't leave until I felt she was able to talk to me, even if that meant I would be late for my meeting.

I sat down with her thinking that all that mattered was to love her. I emptied myself of my worry so that she would feel free to talk to me. I wanted her to know that getting to my meeting wasn't as important as she was.

She began to share with me her problems and concerns about several things that had been bothering her for a long time.

We talked for what seemed like half an hour, and when we finished I had the impression that she felt better, and so did I. The unity between us was stronger than ever.

The hundredfold for me was a hug and a big smile and I found that I still had plenty of time to make it to

my meeting. It was as though time had stopped in doing the will of God in that present moment. **E. B.**

DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Recently I was absolutely deluged with work. I'm an English teacher, and I had the usual stacks of fall semester final exams to read and evaluate, 150 grades to calculate, new classes to prepare, not to mention the continuous demands of an old, rather undependable house and two growing children. I was swamped!

Three days before the grades were due, my father arrived unannounced at my house. My first instinct was to excuse myself from his company as politely as possible so that I could get my work done. And yet I was being given the opportunity right then to love Jesus in my father and I knew that my energy should first of all be focused on this loving — the grades would somehow get done.

Loving my father was not easy. He insisted that this was the perfect time to fix my kitchen sink, which had been out of order for several weeks. I would have been happy to let it continue the way it was for at least a few days more until the pressures of the grading period had passed. He disagreed. Out of love for him I (even cheerfully) supported his newly adopted goal in life: fixing my sink and fixing it *now*.

We went to hardware stores (at least six). We made messes and cleaned up messes. We cut holes in walls. We repeatedly chased the dog who ran out of the yard whenever the back gate was left open (and it was often open so that my father could check the pipes inside.) And so on until the sink was replaced *and* the grades were done. Both events came to completion on the same day. I never would have thought it possible. **O.L.**

1) See inside back cover.

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FOR THE SAKE OF LOVING

I was going on a short trip one day and as I boarded the bus and made myself comfortable, I noticed a young lady and child sitting across the aisle from me. They both needed a clean change of clothes, and I wondered why anybody would travel like that.

Later the bus stopped for lunch, and as we reboarded, I noticed another young lady with an enormous wig into which she had tucked on either side a large flashy flower and a hair comb with feathers and beaded streamers. Also she was wearing a total of eight large rings. It was quite a sight!

At one point I noticed that the newspaper she was reading was full of coupons. I immediately thought of striking up a conversation so that I could eventually ask her for the coupons if she didn't want them. Like a bolt of lightning it hit me that I was willing to talk when it was to my advantage; but this was not love for her. I had built a wall of judgment between us from the first moment I saw her because in some ways I felt superior.

Feeling sorry for my lack of love, I had a little talk with God about my judgment of her and of the first lady and child. Then I immediately made efforts to communicate with the lady wearing the wig but, for the sake of loving, not for the coupons. We soon had a lovely visit. I was amazed at how by loving I no longer noticed her outward appearance. I was once more free and happy.

B.B.

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What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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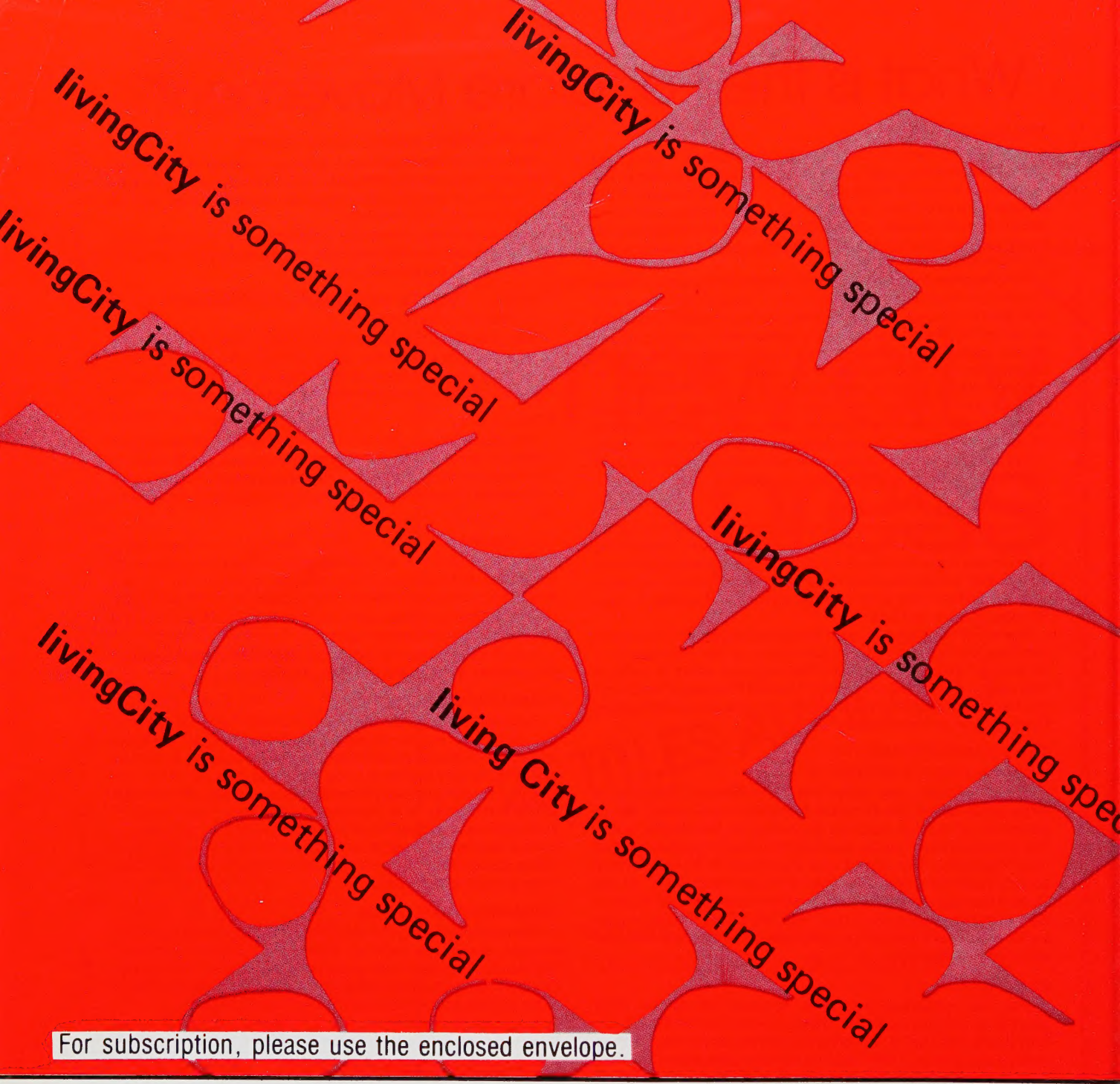
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